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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0533

HENRY A. WAXMAN
33RD DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

May 24, 2013

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20420-0002

Dear Secretary Shinseki:

I am writing to express my appreciation to you for making it a top priority to fix the broken benefits claims process system.

As you know, I was one of the Members of Congress who requested that the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) conduct a study of the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) benefits claims process. In 2012, both the GAO and the VA Inspector General (IG) released scathing reports showing long delays and high error rates at the Los Angeles VA Regional Office (VARO). The IG found that 80% of the claims reviewed in the Los Angeles office were unnecessarily delayed and that the office failed to correctly process 60% of veteran disability claims, 97% of temporary 100 percent disability evaluations, 57% of traumatic brain injury (TBI) claims, and 27% of herbicide exposure-related claims.

The VA has recently set a goal of processing all compensation and pension claims received in 125 days at a 98% accuracy rate by 2015. I share your strong concern that processing times and error rates must be brought down dramatically. It is also essential for sufficient resources to be used to ensure other cases are not neglected, leading to new backlogs.

I am concerned that for chronically homeless and terminally ill veterans, 125 days is still an extraordinarily long time to wait to get benefits approved. Delays are a particular problem in Los Angeles, which has the highest homeless veteran population in the nation. I urge you to initiate a pilot program at the LA VARO to fast-track claims for 50 chronically homeless and terminally ill veterans within a 30-45 day timeframe. The VA could use the pilot program to provide real help to some of our most desperate veterans. It could also develop best practices which, once established and proven to work, could be used to assist larger numbers of homeless veterans at the LA VARO and be implemented at other VA facilities around the country.

Please give careful consideration to this small pilot program. I look forward to your response and hope to hear from you within the next two weeks.

Sincerely,



HENRY A. WAXMAN
Member of Congress